

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Steny Hoyer today announced that [the application period for awards under the SAFER Firefighter Hiring Program](#) will open today and close on Tuesday, June 28, 2005. As co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus, Congressman Hoyer led the effort to establish and fund the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Firefighters Grant Program, which helps local fire departments in Maryland and across the country hire, recruit and retain career and volunteer firefighters.

Funding for this historic new federal grant program was first included in the Fiscal Year 2005 Homeland Security Appropriations bill last year through the adoption of an amendment offered on the House floor by Congressman Hoyer. The President's budget for Fiscal Year 2006 eliminated funding for the SAFER Grant Program. Congressman Hoyer again this year offered an amendment to increase funding for this vital program and the House-passed Fiscal Year 2006 Homeland Security Appropriations bill provides \$75 million for the SAFER Program.

These funds will help career and volunteer fire departments hire new firefighters, recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters, and provide relief to the thousands of local fire stations across the country and in the state of Maryland that are currently operating short of staff. Two-thirds of all professional and volunteer fire departments do not have sufficient personnel to adequately protect the public.

"In addition to inadequate training and outdated equipment, which we already address through the Fire Grant Program, insufficient staffing is a very real problem for far too many of our nation's, our state's, and our community's career and volunteer fire departments," said Congressman Hoyer. "I strongly believe we have an obligation to provide our firefighters with the necessary resources to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible and I will continue to fight to ensure that these important grant programs are adequately funded."

The FY 2005 "SAFER" Firefighter Hiring Program provides financial assistance to local fire departments for the purpose of hiring additional, front line firefighters, and, to support recruitment and retention programs aimed at the volunteer fire service. The program will provide grants on a competitive basis to local fire departments, and to local or statewide organizations representing the interests of the volunteer fire service. Actual awards will be made in the fall of 2005.

The purpose of the SAFER program is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and

career fire departments to increase their cadre of firefighters. SAFER grants are to enhance their ability to attain 24-hour staffing, thus assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. The SAFER grants have two activities that will help grantees attain this goal: 1) hiring of firefighters and 2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

The program will provide a five-year grant to assist fire departments in paying a portion of the salaries of newly hired firefighters and provides assistance with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

The application period for awards under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness (SLGCP), "SAFER" Firefighter Hiring Program will open Tuesday, May 31, 2005 at 8:30 a.m. The application period closes at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 28, 2005.

Interested applicants should consult [www.firegrantsupport.com](http://www.firegrantsupport.com) or call the DHS Fire Grant Help Desk, toll free, at (866) 274-0960, Monday thru Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EDT.

###